

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Edward Lashawn Fields,)	C/A No. 0:15-624-MGL-PJG
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)	
Southern Health Partners, <i>c/o Susan Lopez,</i>)	
<i>LPN,</i>)	
)	
Defendant.)	
_____)	

The plaintiff, Edward Lashawn Fields, a self-represented pretrial detainee, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) (D.S.C.). Plaintiff is a detainee at the Beaufort County Detention Center, and files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915. Having reviewed the Complaint in accordance with applicable law, the court concludes that it should be summarily dismissed.

I. Factual and Procedural Background

Plaintiff alleges that he requested medical attention from an officer at approximately six o'clock on the morning of January 8, 2015, because a "boil on the inside of [Plaintiff's buttocks] area" had ruptured. (ECF No. 1 at 3.) Another officer allegedly informed Plaintiff that a second shift nurse would provide attention after seven-thirty and Plaintiff requested to be seen as an "emergency." (*Id.*) Plaintiff asserts that he spoke to a nurse at nine o'clock that morning, but was not treated by "medical" until three o'clock in the afternoon. (*Id.* at 3-4.) Thus, Plaintiff claims that the defendant delayed medical attention for "almost 9 hours," leaving Plaintiff "in pain" with a

bleeding wound covered by a wash cloth. (Id. at 4.) Nurse Lopez is identified as a medical employee who instructed Plaintiff to notify an officer when the boil ruptured. (Id. at 3.) Plaintiff further alleges that Nurse Lopez failed to communicate Plaintiff's condition to other medical staff prior to shift change. (Id. at 4.) Plaintiff seeks monetary damages. (Id. at 5.)

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

The Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action "fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted," "is frivolous or malicious," or "seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). A finding of frivolousness can be made where the complaint "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." Denton, 504 U.S. at 31. Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. Neitzke, 490 U.S. 319; Allison v. Kyle, 66 F.3d 71 (5th Cir. 1995).

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* complaints. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). Such *pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, id.; Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980); Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. Erickson, 551 U.S. at 93 (citing Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-56 (2007)).

Nonetheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677-78 (2009) (outlining pleading requirements under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for "all civil actions"). The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so; however, a district court may not rewrite a complaint to include claims that were never presented, Barnett v. Hargett, 174 F.3d 1128 (10th Cir. 1999), construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him, Small v. Endicott, 998 F.2d 411 (7th Cir. 1993), or "conjure up questions never squarely presented" to the court, Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985).

B. Analysis

The Complaint is filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which " 'is not itself a source of substantive rights,' but merely provides 'a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere

conferred.’ ” Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994) (quoting Baker v. McCollan, 443 U.S. 137, 144 n.3 (1979)). A legal action under § 1983 allows “a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief.” City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd., 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

1. Lack of Allegations/Improper Defendant

The Complaint contains no direct allegations against the defendant and “[s]ection 1983 will not support a claim based on a *respondeat superior* theory of liability.” Polk Cnty. v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (citing Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)). Moreover, “[b]ecause vicarious liability is inapplicable to Bivens and § 1983 suits, a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official’s own individual actions, has violated the Constitution.” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 676 (2009); see also Vinnedge v. Gibbs, 550 F.2d 926, 928 (4th Cir. 1997). Further, courts in this district have found that “Southern Health Partners . . . is not an entity subject to suit under § 1983.” Harrison v. Ross, C/A No. 2:14-818-MGL-WWD, 2014 WL 6490182, at *7 (D.S.C. Nov. 19, 2014) (adopting and incorporating report and recommendation for summary judgment in favor of the defendants); Werts v. Cnty. of Richland, C/A No. 3:05-3203-MBS, 2007 WL 914039, at *7 (D.S.C. Mar. 23, 2007) (adopting and incorporating report and recommendation finding contract entity that provided healthcare for detention center inmates was not a “person” subject to suit under § 1983). However, as discussed below, even if

Plaintiff had named a defendant amenable to suit under § 1983, the Complaint is still subject to summary dismissal.

2. Deliberate Indifference to Medical Needs

To state a claim for deliberate indifference, an inmate must establish two requirements: (1) a sufficiently serious deprivation occurred, resulting “in the denial of the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities,” and (2) the prison official had a sufficiently culpable state of mind. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994).¹ In the medical context, an inmate “must demonstrate that the officers acted with ‘deliberate indifference’ (subjective) to the inmate’s ‘serious medical needs’ (objective).” Iko v. Shreve, 535 F.3d 225, 241 (4th Cir. 2008) (quoting Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976)).

With regard to the objective prong, a “serious medical need” is “one that has been diagnosed by a physician as mandating treatment or one that is so obvious that even a lay person would easily recognize the necessity for a doctor’s attention.” Iko, 535 F.3d at 241 (quoting Henderson v. Sheahan, 196 F.3d 839, 846 (7th Cir. 1999)). With regard to the subjective prong, a prison official is deliberately indifferent if he has actual knowledge of and disregards “the risk posed by the serious medical needs of the inmate.” Iko, 535 F.3d at 241 (citing Farmer, 511 U.S. at 837); see also Makdessi v. Fields, No. 13-7606, 2015 WL 1062747, at *9 (4th Cir. Mar.12, 2015) (holding that the

¹ Pretrial detainees complaining of inadequate medical care proceed under the Fourteenth Amendment, rather than the Eighth Amendment. See Patten v. Nichols, 274 F.3d 829, 834 (4th Cir. 2001) (noting that “the Fourteenth Amendment rights of pre-trial detainees ‘are at least as great as the Eighth Amendment protections available to a convicted prisoner’ ”) (citation omitted). The standard for reviewing such claims is essentially the same as that for a convicted prisoner under the Eighth Amendment—deliberate indifference to serious medical needs. Hill v. Nicodemus, 979 F.2d 987, 991 (4th Cir. 1992); Martin v. Gentile, 849 F.2d 863, 871 (4th Cir. 1988) (citing Estelle, 429 U.S. at 97).

subjective prong “may be proven by circumstantial evidence that a risk was so obvious that it had to have been known”). To be liable under this standard, the prison official “must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference.” Farmer, 511 U.S. at 837.

Furthermore, not “every claim by a prisoner [alleging] that he has not received adequate medical treatment states a violation of the Eighth Amendment.” Estelle, 429 U.S. at 105. To establish deliberate indifference, the treatment “must be so grossly incompetent, inadequate or excessive as to shock the conscience or to be intolerable to fundamental fairness.” Miltier v. Beorn, 896 F.2d 848, 851 (4th Cir. 1990), overruled in part on other grounds by Farmer, 511 U.S. at 837. Mere negligence, malpractice, or incorrect diagnosis is not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Estelle, 429 U.S. at 106. While the Constitution requires a prison to provide inmates with medical care, it does not demand that a prisoner receive the treatment of his choice. Jackson v. Fair, 846 F.2d 811, 817 (1st Cir. 1988). “[A] prisoner’s mere difference of opinion over matters of expert medical judgment or a course of medical treatment fail[s] to rise to the level of a constitutional violation.” Nelson v. Shuffman, 603 F.3d 439, 449 (8th Cir. 2010) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted) (alterations in original); see also Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 849 (4th Cir. 1985).

While Plaintiff alleges that he did not receive the emergency treatment of his choice, the Complaint indicates that an officer communicated Plaintiff’s request for medical attention to the medical department during a period of shift change. The Complaint further states that a second shift nurse spoke to Plaintiff and promised to provide medical attention when the nurse’s other duties were completed. Plaintiff allegedly received medical treatment six hours after that conversation. Although an intentional delay in medical treatment can give rise to a constitutional violation, Estelle,

429 U.S. at 104-05, Plaintiff's allegations fail to demonstrate that the defendant, or any employee thereof, purposefully delayed medical treatment, or provided such grossly incompetent or inadequate medical care "as to shock the conscience."² Miltier, 896 F.2d at 851; see also Guiden v. Wilson, 344 F. App'x 980, 981 (5th Cir. 2009) (affirming grant of summary judgment to prison officials who declined to provide emergency medical attention for an inmate's boil); Gutierrez v. Peters, 111 F.3d 1364, 1374 (7th Cir. 1997) (affirming dismissal for failure to state a claim because six-day wait to see doctor for an infected cyst was not unreasonable). Moreover, Plaintiff provides no facts to show that the alleged delay in medical treatment caused substantial harm. See Webb v. Hamidullah, 281 F. App'x 159, 166 (4th Cir. 2008) (holding that a constitutional violation only occurs "if the delay results in some substantial harm to the patient"). Accordingly, the Complaint fails to state a cognizable claim of deliberate indifference to Plaintiff's medical needs.

3. State law claims

Because the Complaint's federal claims are recommended for summary dismissal, the district court should decline to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over any state law causes of action raised in this action. See 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)(3); see also United Mine Workers v. Gibbs, 383 U.S. 715, 726 (1966); Tigrett v. Rector and Visitors of the Univ. of Va., 290 F.3d 620, 626 (4th Cir. 2002) (affirming district court's dismissal of state law claims when no federal claims remained in the case).

² The court notes that Plaintiff sues Southern Health Partners "in care of" Susan Lopez. (ECF No. 1 at 1-2.) None of the other officers or nurses discussed in the Complaint are named in the caption or "parties" section as a defendant and Plaintiff failed to provide separate service documents for anyone other than Southern Health Partners. Thus, Southern Health Partners has been construed as the sole defendant in this case. However, to the extent Plaintiff intended to name Nurse Lopez or any other individual discussed in the Complaint as a defendant in this case, he fails to state a cognizable deliberate indifference claim against them.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the Complaint be summarily dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.



Paige J. Gossett
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

April 6, 2015
Columbia, South Carolina

*The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”*

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’ ” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).